MAILED IN BABYLON 4,000 YEARS AGO, JUST DELIVERED

Letter Complains Peevishly About an Unfilled Order for Flour, and Prof. Langdon Has Another of the Same Date in Which Ancient Writer With Modern Troubles Bewails a Wife's Extravagance

Excavations at the Temple Court in Nippur.

By MAY BOSMAN.

UNDOUBTEDLY the Sumerian-Akkadian gentleman of 2500 B. C. took down from the shelves of his library a copy of "The Handy Letter Writer" and sought the model upon which he might build the important communication he had in hand.

To his wife he made little hen scratches and scrawls that great scholars tell us read: "Beloved light of mine eyes! Thy extravagances are beyond all the patience of man. Behold, thy slave is returning without the shekels thou so brazenly demanded. Ever thy devoted husband."

Or, to a slave overseer who had wittingly or unwittingly done him in some household deal, he stylused in hot haste: "It is with sorrow that thy stupidity is borne upon my consciousness. Thou hast cheated me in scales and in price. Damn thee, thou art not worth three bekas a week!"—which is probably what a slave's food cost then.

At all events, the great wealth of tablet records dug up in Mesopotamia in recent years and cleaned and deciphered shows so many little familiar, intimate touches and such an abundance of letter writing on all subjects under the sun that the possibility of the existence of epistolary guides then must be borne upon our consciousness too.

An interesting lot of deciphering of such tablets is being accomplished by Dr. Stephen Langdon, who came in September from Oxford, England, to be curator of the Babylonian division of the University of Pennsylvania Museum in Philadelphia. Dr. Langdon will be remembered as the decipherer of the Flood and Creation tablets a year ago last summer and his translations aroused worldwide comment and discussion. He is a young man still, but he is the only man living who has seen and handled all the thousands of tablets unearthed by University of Pennsylvania Museum expeditions above the site of Nippur, both those retained by the authorities at Constantinople and those sent to Philadelphia; and, according to Prof. A. H. Sayce, the British orientalist, lecturer and expert in matters Hittite, he promises to become the greatest Babylonian scholar in the world within the next five years.

In other words, Prof. Sayce, an old man now, expects Oxford and the public to place Langdon in the Sayce niche at the close of the war.

So radically have some of Dr. Langdon's interpretations differed from those of his colleagues that a storm of protest and dissent greeted his 1915 translation, which proved that our Mother Eve had had naught to do with original sin; that the silly apple story was a rank libel, based on an ancient legend of a fellow named Tagtug, who perpetrated all the damage. Tagtug he identifies with Noah. THE SUN published at the time the dissenting opinions of various scholars in America and England on Dr. Langdon's translation.

In spite of the storm he raised, Dr. Langdon pursued his way serenely, refused to talk back, and published last summer a translation of the fragmentary history of mankind after the Flood, another of the tablets that are, supposedly, companion pieces to the Flood story. There are three of these, much mutilated and damaged, with many lines entirely missing, but all are unmistakably written by the same hand. In deciphering them, Dr. Langdon still finds the story of Tagtug and other essential differences from Biblical lore. It is to be hoped that the missing parts of these tablets will yet be found—and the Tagtug story everywhere confirmed.

If the little marks and curlicues do not say to Dr. Langdon what they have sometimes said to other scholars, he still refuses, with British dignity, to argue the point. There are only about fifteen men in the world who can read Sumerian and Babylonian characters, and he is one of them. These Babylonian experts pick up a tablet and read its half obliterated writing as we read our newspapers, with a general sense of what it is all about. When they come to transcribe and set down a story for the world, they pore over it and make sure of every point.

About some of these points there is a divergence of opinion which in time is definitely settled and another unalterable syllable or word added to the Babylonian language. Dr. Langdon has a remarkable mind, and it is conceivable that his very youth, his "pep" in business parlance, has combined with a positive genius to grant him a quicker insight into Sumerian readings, and that his translations of the Creation and the Flood stories are correct versions of the oldest aspects of those traditions.

What the University of Pennsylvania Museum authorities think of him is evidenced by their persistent efforts to get him to come to them. Thanks to the war, which has left Oxford a dull, dead spot, America has secured him for one year. He will decipher as many as possible of the thousands of tablets that have been cleaned at the University of Pennsylvania Museum, will publish translations of all important ones, now or later, and will classify and catalogue the collection, a stupendous task. It is also the aim of the museum to have him meet visitors on certain days of the week and give real, accurate and vital information. Scholars may come to him with questions on the oldest books in the world. The arrangement is unique and ought to prove of inestimable worth.

In 2500 B. C. papyrus and paper for writing were unknown. Men scratched with a pointed steel instrument called a stylus on unbaked red clay tablets of various sizes, mostly about the size, shape and thickness of a small book. They wrote on both sides, and then, if they were not through, continued on another tablet. The analogy of these tablets to sheets of paper is not hard to comprehend. Sometimes a tale stops in the middle and the next tablet on which it was continued is never found, or is found years later.

In the temples amanuenses were busy copying old pieces of literature to hand down to posterity, just as later monks spent their days and their nights copying laboriously and preserving old books for the archives of the monastery. The work of the amanuenses was placed on shelves in a library—neat little rows and piles of clay books. Men digging five thousand years later have found them, and other men have spent their lives in studying them, that they might tell us what the tablets say.

The books cover a wide field and comprise odes, epics, religious hymns, dictionaries, scientific pamphlets. The old Babylonian and Sumerian temples were, also, great industrial, commercial, agricultural and stock raising centres, and they kept a vast number of documents relating to these various interests.

Millions of tablets have been found recording sales of cattle, slaves and staple goods; marriage contracts and agreements; divorce decrees; wills; receipts for innumerable things from jewelry and women's dresses to human chattels. There are the timekeepers' slips of the temple workers, and bookkeeping accounts. Dr. Langdon has found that one big banking house did business in the city of Babylon for six hundred years, the Rothschilds of those days.

The great bulk of the tablets have been found on the site of the ancient temple of Nippur in Babylonia. This temple was both a religious centre and a college designed primarily for the education of priests, but the range of text books unearthed there shows that instruction began at a primary stage and continued through elementary and grammar grades to the regulation college course, as Babylonians conceived it, and to theological classes. The text books show a high order of intellectuality. Indeed, the resemblances of these people to us of today bring home again the unchangeableness of the great antiquity of civilization, so called.

Boys' exercise books have been found repeatedly, in this and in other collections. They were like present day school slates but made of wet clay, and the little fellow marked on them with a stylus, and when he made a mistake blotted it out with his thumb. Dr. Langdon has found such a slate, with the thumb print so clearly and plainly defined that it could be used in a criminal investigation!

On one side the boy had scratched his exercise lesson in the Sumerian syllables, the equivalent of our alphabet. On the back was his spelling lesson, all bethumbed. He was a wretched little speller; one can see him stabbing his dirty little thumb into various bad places. It seems incredible that he lived and died 4,200 years ago.

The quality and range of the text books astonish one. Books on mathematics abound; they taught the multiplication table up to 2,400 and 2,500 times a number. In their financial transactions Sumerians had to do stupendous calculations in their heads. Dr. Langdon has just found, too, a comprehensive volume used in the study of law; and among the grammar books one dealing particularly and completely with the use of the preposition. A race that has arrived at the preposition is by no means primitive! The date of this book is 2300 B. C.

Geography was taught, as were astronomy and history. In the collection is the oldest history yet found, a tablet giving the list of Babylonian kings going back to the Flood. The claim is that it is a record of 25,000 years; but this may be disputed, since the names of the monarchs, which seem to be those of men who reigned successively, may be of men who ruled simultaneously, in kingdoms that were adjacent. A conservative estimate is that this history covers 14,000 years.

Dr. Stephen Langdon.

There is a book on botany, teaching the people how to raise the date palm, an important crop of the times. Agricultural books abound, for the temple had a collegiate department, just as have Cornell and other American universities, where scientific farming was taught. The Babylonians, as is well known, were remarkable engineers and past masters in the field of irrigation. It is not surprising that Dr. Langdon has found many records of this in the museum's Babylonian collection. We learn, again, of canals being dug, and of a tablet that chronicles the opening of a great waterway, like the Panama Canal—the celebration over it, the presence of the king, and the pride felt in the great skill of its engineers.

Further documents are reported verifying previous assertions that the Babylonian woman received an education equal to man's, took her place with him in certain lines, and was compensated with the same wage as he.

Among the many legendary tablets in the collection is part of a Sumerian version of the goddess Ishtar's journey to the lower world in quest of her lover, the dying god of vegetation, Tammuz, which is one of the delightful episodes in Babylonian story and verse. In a recent publication of his translation of this Dr. Langdon says:

"Until recently the only known version has been that of the famous text of the Assurbanipal library from Nineveh possessed by the British Museum, redacted in pure Semitic. It has been justly regarded as one of the finest literary productions of antiquity. The Ninevite text was copied by the scribes of Asurbanipal in some Babylonian library, and has come down to us slightly damaged on the obverse.

"The Temple or Palace library at Assur, the ancient capital of Assyria, recently excavated by the German expedition, also possessed a copy of this poem; this copy is now published by Dr. Ebeling in the official publications of the Berlin Museum and restores nearly the entire text. The Semitic Babylonian version has not been recovered. It has been, however, commonly supposed that the poem originated in Babylonia and was first composed in Semitic. The two Assyrian texts contain about one hundred and forty lines.

"The origin of the legend itself is known to have been Sumerian so far as Babylonian religion is concerned. It was originally similar to the Egyptian form of this myth in which Isis, the mother goddess, is the sister of Osiris, the dying god. Through Semitic influence the myth in Babylonia became composite, the Sumerian tradition being largely given up in favor of the Semitic view in which the earth goddess was the mother of Tammuz.

"The original Sumerian name of this unmarried earth goddess was Gestin, or goddess of the vine, but a name almost equally old was Innini, 'heavenly queen.' In the Sumerian myth she is usually referred to as Innini. The Semites identified her with their own goddess Ishtar and substituted her name for the Sumerian appellative in the Semitic poem.

"The story told throughout antiquity of the descent of the weeping mother goddess into the 'Land of Return' to search for her departed son and lover Tammuz (the western and Greek Adonis) certainly belongs to the original Sumerian tradition, as has been proved by an interesting tablet from the Nippur collection in Constantinople. The myth has almost certainly an astronomical origin, being based upon the Sumerian identification of Innini with Sirius Major or the Dog Star.

"This star was invisible for about two months of the year and then reappeared over the horizon beneath which it had sunk. What more natural than that this imaginative people should weave a tale of love and search for it in the lower regions?

"The Semitic poem is obviously based upon this Sumerian original, Dr. Langdon says further. At any rate, the Nippur library contained a complete Sumerian poem based on the myth of the descent of Innini or Ishtar, and that tablet now constitutes one of the most important archaeological discoveries yet made in the University Museum treasure.

"Books" had no cases and when found are often crumbled, broken, cracked or so badly chipped that parts of the translation must be guessed at or omitted entirely. Others, fortunately, are found intact.

Letters, on the other hand, were sent in envelopes, also of clay. When the tablet letter had been duly inscribed and signed, it was rolled in fine clay powder and slipped into a hollow clay pocket. More clay dust was then shaken in, so that layers of powder were packed about the contents of the pocket and the letter could not get rubbed or scratched. The clay opening was then sealed and stamped with the sender's ring.

Afterward, the address was added and a slave despatched with it. Later, we know that Babylonian and Sumerian governments supported regular postal systems. It is quite possible that that regime was in existence in 2300 B. C.

Many letters are found with seals unbroken, and these are marvellously preserved in their soft powder pads. We can only surmise the reason for their sealed state. Perhaps a man kept sealed copies of the most important letters he had to write. Duplicate copies of records and transactions have been unearthed, sometimes miles apart; and the same practice could have held, rationally, of letters.

Some of these letters may never have been delivered, thanks to an inefficient postal service in some particular locality; or, and this is more plausible, the breaking out of frequent revolutions could have conceivably crippled the Babylonian post offices and left many letters forever undelivered.

Indubitably the oldest undelivered letter in the world is in the Babylonian collection of the University of Pennsylvania museum. Its date would be 2200 B. C., and Dr. Langdon opened and read it only last week!

It is from a master to his slave or to some underling or employee. Obviously, it is only one of several letters, since it refers to previous correspondence and to a previous transaction over which the writer is perturbed. Its archaic Sumerian is dictatorial, overbearing and peevish, and rants of some unsatisfactory flour deal that the underling has undertaken. One wonders whatever became of that flour!

Other tablets now being catalogued have pictures on them. One, a hunting scene, reminds one of the prehistoric cave drawings found in France. There is another of a battle scene, very much broken but rare and interesting.

The coming of Dr. Langdon to the University of Pennsylvania museum is timely and fortunate. The Babylonian division has had no curator since the beginning of the European war, when Dr. Arno Poebel left to join his regiment at the German front. The Eckley B. Coxe, Jr., expeditions, which began operations in Egypt in 1889 and have carried them on through various years since, even finding localities of the war ridden land where they can still operate this year, have sent back to the museum an incalculable treasure trove, not only in tablets but in all kinds of articles dug up from the dirt layers of Biblical and pre-Biblical lands.

All this accumulation has not had the attention it deserved. Dr. Langdon's labors will be bent toward arranging the Babylonian exhibit. The collection is the largest in America, the second largest in the world. No other museum has such a quantity of sacred Sumerian documents, which make this the most important Babylonian collection in the world, even though it is not so large as that in the British Museum.

The war, which already has done so much damage, bids fair to rob us of this comparative recent achievement, the ability to decipher these tablets which tell of the lives and histories of peoples who lived so many hundred years ago. Younger men, like Poebel, are at the front and may never come back; other well known Egyptologists are old men.

Not enough young men will be left to carry on the work of translating the ancient cuneiform writings; and no less a man than Prof. A. H. Sayce asserts that the outlook is disheartening. When the present scholars pass away the achievement may die with them and Sumerian-Akkadian become again a dead language, for not enough young college men are proposing to take up archaeology.

There is to-day no endowed seat of Assyriology in any university. The University of Pennsylvania museum is exerting every effort to secure such an endowment, that other intellects of so high an order as Dr. Langdon's may be encouraged and helped to carry on a work similar to his.

Eckley B. Coxe, Jr., died in Philadelphia in September last and left an endowment fund of $500,000 to carry on the work he has been equipping expeditions to do in Egypt so many years. But one expedition can only scratch the surface of the myriad hills there and the countless buried and forgotten cities that lie beneath them.

"Our only hope of getting the rest of the tablets buried there," says Dr. Langdon, "is to go back to Nippur again and again, and dig for them." Endowments for these expeditions are another of the crying needs of scholars. The world at large will lose if archaeological excavations and research have to be abandoned.

There is no doubt that the general public appreciates the work done by museums and by scholars. To Biblical students alone there is inexhaustible pleasure and satisfaction to be derived from facts unearthed of Biblical and pre-Biblical peoples.

There is now complete agreement among archaeologists that Hammurabi is that same Amraphel of Genesis xiv., 1, a contemporary of Abraham. From chronological inferences it follows that Abraham may well have attended school at the temple in Nippur; nay, that he studied these very books that are now in the University of Pennsylvania museum. He may have read there the account of the Creation. Why not? The dates dovetail.

"Let me take out and touch one of those tablets," said a religious man recently in the University of Pennsylvania museum. "I believe in my heart that the hand of Abraham must have held any or all of them nearly five thousand years ago!"

ST. IGNATIUS'S JUBILEE RECALLS ANOTHER NEW YORK

When Church Was Built Fifth Avenue, Western Boundary of Parish, Was Muddy Footpath and Fashion Dwelt by the East River

IT is a young city, New York. To-day it stands almost a completed product. Yet it was not so many years ago that cows roamed over ground that is now valued at a dollar a square inch, that squatter cabins were perched on rocks that now form foundations for mansions. In fact, little more than a half century ago a great part of Manhattan was virgin woodland and farmland.

What fifty years have wrought in the development of New York is brought home with striking emphasis in the golden jubilee that is to be celebrated in the parish of St. Ignatius Loyola in the last week of this month. The growth of this Roman Catholic church at Eighty-fourth street and Park avenue must be set side by side with the growth of Yorkville, and both play an important part in municipal history.

A fine pile is the church of St. Ignatius, standing in the ruiness of its Renaissance beauty in the heart of Yorkville. It is a church worthy of its surroundings, or perhaps it might be better to say the environment is worthy of the church. Its parishioners include the well to do as well as those less fortunate in this world's goods. But once the case was different.

Sixty-six years ago, for that was when the church really was organized, the western boundary of the parish, Fifth avenue, which now has its row of palaces, was a muddy footpath. The section was called Irishtown and the residents thereof were known as shanty Irish. Central Park shut itself off from the present Fifth avenue with a goat and picket fence. Where the home of Andrew Carnegie stands the former owner did not think enough of the property to fence it in. It was a dumping ground for Irishtown's tin cans.

Fashion in those days selected the parish's other boundary, the East River waterfront, for its residences. At Eighty-seventh street, commanding a view of Hell Gate, was the Astor home. It was here that Washington Irving wrote "Astoria." The Livingstons had their home near by. Tenements occupy their grounds to-day.

Just one of these old homes is standing, the Gracie mansion, which now is the infirmary of St. Joseph's Orphan Asylum at Eighty-ninth street and Avenue A. In this old place the Gracies entertained Louis Philippe, and here Tom Moore, the Irish bard, lived when he visited New York.

Third avenue was then the vein of life for Yorkville. Its macadamized road invited the coach and fours of the New York folk. Yorkville was considered a rather remote village. A bit of a run it was considered in those days from Washington Square to the Hazard House at Eighty-fourth street and Third avenue.

Outside of a few stores near the Hazard House and the mansions along the river front there were not more than a dozen other houses. Yorkville had a population of several hundred, but the majority lived in shacks that were perched atop of the rocks that abounded in the territory.

The building of the lower reservoir in Central Park contributed much to Yorkville's development. It brought into the section several hundred Irish laborers, who worked hard all week, fought on Saturday night and went to church on Sunday. And going to church then meant sacrifice, because the nearest Catholic church was miles down town.

Irishtown wanted its own church and its own priest, so a group of its residents went to Bishop Hughes with a petition. This was the Bishop Hughes who as Archbishop during the civil war did much to put down the draft riots. The laborers offered to build a church and support the priest. At that time the diocese of Bishop Hughes extended all over New York State and New Jersey, and he had only 109 priests under him. These priests sometimes went hundreds of miles on a sick call. Therefore, Bishop Hughes hardly could spare one of his workers for such a nebulous parish.

Just about the time the petition was presented there came from Trinidad a young Irishman, fever racked and emaciated. He wanted rest and a change of climate. His weakened condition would not permit him to undertake the duties of an ordinary parish, so Bishop Hughes sent this priest, Eugene O'Reilly, to Yorkville.

On August 10, 1851, the first mass was celebrated in the basement of a two story frame building in Eighty-third street, near Lexington avenue. With this ceremony the parish was inaugurated. It was called after St. Lawrence, because Lawrence O'Toole was Ireland's last canonized saint.

Father O'Reilly wore himself out to build up the young community to which he had been sent. After fifty-one weeks of endeavor he died. As an interim appointee Bishop Hughes sent Father Ouillet to St. Lawrence's. This was the priest who went out as chaplain with the Sixty-ninth Regiment. The fighting Irishmen never could pronounce his name, so he changed it to Willett. He was side by side with the men of the Sixty-ninth all through the civil war.

He was in charge of St. Lawrence's parish for only two months until Father Walter Quarter was appointed. A massive man was Father Quarter, tall and broad. He always carried a big stick. It was to good use he put this stick in the time of the draft riots. Some of the rioters had burned down the Yorkville station and then went into the New York Central cut, at what is now Park avenue, to tear up the railroad tracks.

Father Quarter berated them and belabored the ringleaders. He rounded them up near the church and there for hours talked to them in a driving rainstorm. As the wet soaked into them the rioting spirit oozed out. It was a sacrificial occasion for the pastor. He went to his bed and never came out of it until he went to the grave.

He did much for St. Lawrence's in the time he was pastor, from 1852 to December, 1863. He built a real home for the church, a frame building in Eighty-fourth street. Then when this was completed he set about the construction of a brick church and turned the old one into a school. The first substantial home for St. Lawrence's was on the site of the sanctuary of the present St. Ignatius's Church. It was opened on Christmas Day, 1853.

So rapidly was the community growing that toward the end of his regime Father Quarter had an assistant, Father Samuel Mulledy. This priest had been a Jesuit, but had left that order for secular work. He became pastor of St. Lawrence's in 1857 and continued until his death in 1866. On his deathbed he requested to be taken back into the Jesuit order.

In the little basement where the first mass was said there had been 400 worshippers. At the end of the civil war the congregation had grown to several thousand and three priests were required for the parish work. Because of the return of Father Mulledy into the Jesuit order Archbishop McCloskey, who had succeeded the militant Hughes, turned the church of St. Lawrence over to the Society of Jesus. With it he gave jurisdiction over the House of the Good Shepherd, at Ninetieth street and the East River.

The parish as originally marked out extended from Seventy-second to 106th street and between the park and the East River. So rapid has been the growth of Yorkville and the city in the fifty years the Jesuits have had charge of the parish that this same territory now requires six other churches, and there are besides a German and a French congregation within its confines.

Father Mareschal was the first of the Society of Jesus to say mass in St. Lawrence's. He was sent over from Blackwell's Island, where he had been working among the inmates of the penitentiary and the workhouse.

By this time the old school established in the early days of the parish had outgrown its quarters and a new school was built in 1870 to accommodate 600 children. In addition to this there was another development, the school conducted by the Sisters of Charity and known as St. Lawrence's Academy for Young Ladies.

Father Mareschal had been directed in his parish work by the superior of the Church of St. Francis Xavier. Fordham gave St. Lawrence its first independent superior, Father Moylan.

As far back as 1886 the foundations were laid for the present church. For thirteen years services were held in the basement. The present rectory was built in 1882. Not until 1905 was the church completed. With its completion permission was requested from Rome to change its name, and it became the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola and St. Lawrence. The basement still holds the name of the Irish saint.

The memory of the Park avenue tunnel disaster in the early '80s has not faded from the New York mind yet. It happened close to the rectory and every priest who could be spared from his sacerdotal duties went into the Central's tunnel. They ministered to the dying and aided the firemen and police in getting out those who had been killed in the train collision. Father O'Connor was superior at that time. The exposure he suffered in the tunnel brought him down with pneumonia. He died a few days afterward.

Father J. Haven Richards is superior now. The parish lines have been drawn inward, so that they include the territory from Seventy-fifth to Ninety-fourth street between the park and Second avenue, below Eighty-sixth street and Third avenue above Eighty-sixth. It is a parish wherein more wealth is concentrated than in any other Catholic district with the exception of St. Patrick's.

Characteristically the Jesuits have done much for education. They have indirect charge of St. Lawrence's Academy, they maintain the Loyola school for grammar and high school pupils and the last superior, Father Hearn, built the Regis High School. The priests of St. Ignatius also have under their care all of Blackwell's Island. The church maintains a day nursery in its social work.

Many are the sodalities and societies of the church. Men, boys, girls, young women and older women have different sodalities. A branch of the Holy Name Society is established in the parish and there are a rosary society, an altar society, St. John Berchman's Sanctuary Society, the Bona Mors Confraternity, the Apostleship of Prayer, the School Debt Society, the Association for the Propagation of the Faith, a conference of St. Vincent de Paul and a convert class.

All these organizations will participate in the jubilee celebration of the coming of the Jesuits to the church. The ceremonies will open on Sunday, November 26, with a solemn pontifical mass to be sung by the Apostolic Delegate, Mgr. Bonzano. Cardinal Farley will be enthroned at this service. The jubilee will close December 3.

Church of St. Ignatius Loyola.